

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

**FOR THE NEXT MAYOR OF
THE WEST MIDLANDS**

**10 priorities to protect people and planet
and help the COVID-19 recovery**

We're facing a climate and ecological emergency – the biggest threat we've ever seen to humanity's existence. What's more, we need to recover from the damage COVID-19 has done to businesses, jobs, and livelihoods. This is the challenge that awaits the next Mayor of the West Midlands

Whoever is elected as the next mayor can't single-handedly solve the crisis, but must use the powers they have to make as big a difference as possible. The mayor has a central role to play in providing a vision for the area, and will need to work with councils, businesses, local communities, and the national government.

Tackling the climate, nature and COVID-19 crises must be done in a way which benefits everyone, no matter their income, race, age, or background. It's essential to address the sheer scale of inequalities that exist.

People who are most marginalised – both here in the UK and across the world – have done the least to cause climate breakdown and are the least able to rebound from its impacts.

People on lower-incomes, and particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, suffer most from the lack of nature and green space in our towns and cities. This is also true of air pollution, despite a smaller proportion of lower-income and BAME people owning cars than others.

Young people's futures are most at risk from climate breakdown and the decline of nature, and they're also disproportionately impacted by the economic impact of COVID-19.

The next mayor must also shift how the success of a COVID-19 recovery plan is measured. Rather than focusing on economic growth, metrics should identify whether the plan reduces poverty, decreases inequalities, increases wellbeing, and meets carbon reduction and nature restoration goals.

This Climate Action Plan will help the next mayor address the climate and ecological emergencies at the same time as responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

10 priorities the next Mayor of the West Midlands should commit to:

- 1** Ensuring all infrastructure plans, programmes, and investment decisions – including plans to “build back better” from COVID-19 – are in line with what's needed to address the climate and ecological emergency. The region has produced #WM2041 – A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery – which is welcome, but there needs to be more activity on the ground, much more quickly than at present.
- 2** Ensuring those most impacted by climate breakdown and nature loss are heard and centre-stage in decision-making.
- 3** Protecting workers and communities through a just transition from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to a low-carbon, nature-rich, circular economy, including delivering the 28,637 jobs that a Local Government Association analysis says could be created in the region by 2030.
- 4** Introducing policies and measures that ensure new development is net zero carbon and existing homes are brought up to high energy standards, thereby relegating fuel poverty to the history books.
- 5** At least doubling public transport use, cycling, and walking within the next 10 years, to cut climate emissions and ensuring everyone can breathe clean air.
- 6** Powering the region by clean, renewable energy and reaping the economic and job opportunities it will bring, while ensuring fossil fuels are kept in the ground.
- 7** Greening the city-region by increasing tree cover, protecting nature, and eliminating green-space deprivation.
- 8** Becoming a zero-waste city-region by 2030 without reliance on landfill or incineration, to reduce pressures on nature from resource extraction and pollution.
- 9** Calling on the local government pension scheme to divest from fossil fuels to, stop profiting from environmental harm.
- 10** Making the very best of the infrastructure we have, to enact the Climate Emergency declarations, defend nature and introduce more inclusive governance.

What this looks like:

1

Ensuring all infrastructure plans, programmes, and investment decisions - including plans to “build back better” from COVID-19 - are in line with what’s needed to address the climate and ecological emergency.

Too many councils and combined authorities across the country are simultaneously declaring climate emergencies while promoting more high-carbon infrastructure like new roads. They also continue to invest in fossil fuels and promote high-carbon activities such as aviation. The adage, that “when you’re in a hole, stop digging”, is apt. All decisions need to be in line with what’s needed to address the climate and ecological emergency.

It’s welcome that the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has agreed #WM2041 – A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery and work is underway to set a carbon budget. It’s also welcome that the WMCA realises the scale of the challenge.

There are different estimates of how fast greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced if WMCA is to do its fair share in combating climate breakdown, ranging from 7% to over 25% per year. Researchers at the Tyndall Centre have published a detailed carbon report for every local authority and say that WMCA should reduce its emissions by at least 13.1% per year and reach net zero no later than 2042. The mayor must create a sense of urgency within WMCA to deliver this and report annually on progress.

High-carbon developments throughout the region include HS2 and its associated stations, Interchange and to a lesser extent Curzon Street, proposed expansions at Birmingham International Airport, new road proposals within and adjacent to the Combined Authority area, as well as development on the Green Belt. These are completely incompatible with getting on the right path to zero carbon.

Practical action:

The mayor should work with partners across the region to develop an ambitious infrastructure development plan that complies with scientifically robust carbon budgets and nature recovery. This will involve working with local councils, the business sector, public services, trade unions, universities, and civil society. Infrastructure needed to tackle the climate and ecological emergency includes large-scale programmes for building segregated cycleways and trams, new renewable energy capacity, new green spaces in areas suffering from green space-deprivation, and retrofitting houses with energy efficiency and eco-heating on an area-by-area basis. These programmes would create much needed jobs and help COVID-19 recovery.

The HS2 project is incompatible with the climate emergency. HS2’s environmental and climate benefits are completely out of scale compared to what we must do right now to address climate breakdown. We need to invest in schemes that benefit many more people. The Metro mayor should object to HS2 and instead champion walking, cycling, bus travel and local train and tram lines, where appropriate. Conflicts between tram lines and plans to reopen local railway lines should always be resolved in favour of local rail and better connectivity. The mayor should also take measures to reduce the need to travel, road danger and car dependency.

High-carbon developments, such as any further expansion at Birmingham International Airport and road building, should also be rejected, ensuring that Birmingham’s 2022 Commonwealth Games don’t leave a high-carbon legacy and are the greenest games ever. And the mayor should ensure that the climate and nature emergencies are reflected in Coventry’s City of Culture events in May 2021.

The mayor should use their influence within the region and at national level to ensure an infrastructure programme for climate and nature is fully resourced. All existing major schemes should be reviewed to ensure they are compliant.

2

Ensuring those most impacted by climate breakdown and nature loss are heard and centre-stage in decision-making.

In the West Midlands 804 neighbourhoods have been identified by researchers as being particularly vulnerable to surface flooding due to their location and demographics (for example, age or income). Flooding and extreme heat will both be exacerbated by climate breakdown.

In addition, 60 neighbourhoods have been identified as among those most deprived of green space in England. Green space is essential for physical and mental health and the lack of it in some areas has become very apparent during COVID-19 lockdowns.

It must also be recognised that those who have done least to contribute to climate breakdown are often the most vulnerable to its effects.

Practical action:

The mayor must commit to involving all citizens, but especially young people and the most vulnerable communities in decision-making and action planning. The mayor must also recognise the impact of decisions made today on the wellbeing of future generations and commit to having youth representation on the governance structures within the region.

Deliberative democracy approaches like citizen juries, citizen assemblies, and participatory mapping and budgeting should be used, especially for complicated or contentious choices.

Spending on climate change adaptation and nature restoration should focus on the most vulnerable communities. Carbon Literacy should be a major communication priority for the mayor.

3

Protecting workers and communities through a just transition from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to a low-carbon, nature-rich, circular economy, including delivering 28,637 new jobs in the region by 2030.

Green jobs and training will both be necessary to achieve a credible and sustainable plan for the region and to help the region's economy recover from the pandemic. The green economy is already the fastest growing part of the UK economy and action in this area will benefit the region.

The Local Government Association (LGA) says nearly 0.7 million direct jobs could be created in England's low-carbon and renewable-energy economy by 2030, rising to more than 1.18 million by 2050. Developing green industry, jobs and training programmes are essential to the future of the West Midlands.

The LGA analysis suggests the region could benefit from 28,637 jobs over the next decade. That includes a potential 2,503 jobs in low-carbon electricity, 7,661 in low-carbon heat, 1,297 in alternative fuels, 7,013 in energy efficiency, 2,419 in low-carbon services, and 7,744 in low-emissions vehicles and related infrastructure.

Practical action:

The mayor should invest in green jobs, apprenticeships, and sustainable enterprise, leaving no communities behind. The job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic mean that plans, investments and decisions to build the green economy in sectors such as renewable energy, housing retrofit, sustainable transport, nature restoration and the circular economy must be fast-tracked and prioritised. The mayor must push for the UK government to give councils the resources and powers to accelerate skills development. The mayor must also work with businesses, unions and others to develop locally relevant transition plans and for local investment to develop new employment within these sectors.

The mayor should empower workers and residents with the knowledge and motivation to act through programmes such as Carbon Literacy.

4

Introducing policies and measures that ensure new development is net zero carbon and existing homes are brought up to high energy standards, thereby relegating fuel poverty to the history books.

Any new homes and developments need to be built as net zero carbon. But most of the buildings that will be in use over the next 50 years have already been built. Only 32% of homes are currently well insulated in the West Midlands. This represents a shocking waste of energy, high greenhouse gas emissions and unnecessarily high energy bills.

12% of households in the area are in fuel poverty, which means they can't afford to heat their homes properly. Poor insulation contributes to this problem. With more people at home because of unemployment resulting from COVID-19 or increased home working, this problem will get worse without urgent action.

Practical action:

All homes must be brought up to high energy-efficiency standards by rolling out an area-by-area retrofit and heat-pump installation programme, ending the misery of cold, expensive-to-heat homes. 86,059 homes need to be insulated every year within the West Midlands to ensure all homes are properly insulated by 2030.

In addition, the transition away from gas-fired boilers in our homes to eco-heating systems needs to be well underway. At least 45,629 heat pumps need to be fitted every year in the West Midlands.

All new development must be net zero carbon, including all housing as standard, starting immediately.

5

At least doubling public transport use, cycling, and walking within the next 10 years, to cut climate emissions and ensure everyone can breathe clean air.

The West Midlands must achieve a dramatic change to transport infrastructure and travel habits so that using public transport (when it's safe to do so) or cycling and walking become the default. Enabling people to get around with minimum impact on the environment will also bring about big improvements in air quality. Everybody should be able to live decently and get about without needing a car. Across the UK, almost 50% of the lowest income families (people in the bottom 20% income bracket) don't have access to a car. The proportion of women that don't have access to one is twice that of men. Access to alternatives to car ownership is a social justice and social cohesion issue, as well as an environmental issue.

Air pollution is a real problem and limits for the toxic gas nitrogen dioxide are breached across the area. Fine particulate matter (PM) air pollution is the most damaging to health, and even World Health Organisation (WHO) standards aren't considered "safe". A Clean Air Zone (CAZ) is due to be implemented around Birmingham City Centre in June 2021. It focuses on nitrogen dioxide, but also needs a commitment to achieve the PM2.5 target in the Environment Bill as soon as possible. The West Midlands should commit to meeting the WHO target for PM2.5 soon across the whole of the West Midlands Combined Authority. This should be done through a reduction in vehicular traffic and rebalancing existing infrastructure. A full impact assessment of PM2.5 across the West Midlands is required. The mayor should start a discussion about how new charging regimes for motoring across the West Midlands should be introduced.

The mayor must protect the health of local people and commit to taking action to ensure air quality standards are met across the whole region.

Practical action:

On mainland Europe many places provide much better public transport. As a result, levels of public transport use are 3 to 4 times higher than they are in the UK's combined authority areas (see graph: Verkehrsverbünde are integrated regional public transport services).

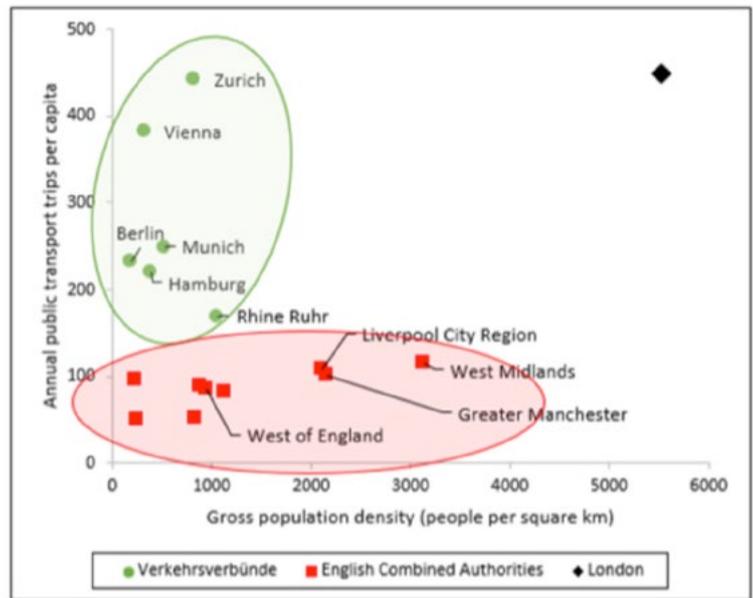
To double public transport use, cycling and walking, the barriers to a good transport system need to be

removed. The mayor should call for additional powers to re-regulate buses, develop a franchise system or commit to implementing these powers where they are already in place. In mainland Europe some regions also control suburban trains as well as buses. Metro lines across the West Midlands should not be built at the expense of reopening former railway lines for trains.

The West Midlands can also do much better at providing safe cycling routes. Research shows that 28% of commuter journeys in the region could be by bike if there was good cycling infrastructure, such as segregated cycleways and the uptake of e-bikes. A comprehensive network of safe segregated cycle routes like those planned in Copenhagen, Denmark should be the goal.

Pop-up cycle lanes and other active travel measures introduced as part of the emergency response to COVID-19 should be kept in place wherever possible, and new routes should be connected across the region. It's really important to build community support for these changes and consult in advance about new routes and measures.

Currently only around 29% of commuter journeys in the West Midlands are by walking, cycling and public transport. As a bare minimum, the mayor should work to increase this to 67% by 2030. Money to achieve this transformation can be raised through schemes like the Workplace Parking Levy successfully pioneered by Nottingham City Council.



Annual per capita public transport trips in six continental Verkehrsverbünde (Transport Authorities), the English Combined Authorities, and London

6 Powering the region with clean, renewable energy and reaping the economic and job opportunities it will bring, while ensuring fossil fuels are kept in the ground.

A rapid growth in renewable energy is needed to wean the UK off electricity produced by fossil fuels and to provide the extra electricity needed to heat homes and power transport. Some of this renewable energy can be provided in the West Midlands.

Practical action:

Sustainable energy infrastructure and renewable energy production must be delivered across the region in partnership with local authorities, communities, and energy utilities. In particular, community ownership of renewable energy should be encouraged and supported.

Currently 161,527 GWh of renewable energy is generated in the West Midlands. This is equal to only 0.90% of household energy use. If every council area within the region matched the best similar areas, then 1,322,882 GWh could be produced.

In addition, all public purchasing of energy should also be from 100% renewable power.

7 Greening the city region by increasing tree cover, protecting nature, and eliminating green-space deprivation.

Access to good quality green space is essential for people's physical and mental health. Green space, trees and other "green infrastructure" are also essential for nature. Friends of the Earth has used data on green space, gardens, and open-access land to rate access to green space for neighbourhoods

in the region ([a map is available here](#)). Results unsurprisingly show that low-income and BAME communities are worst off when it comes to access to green space.

Practical action:

In the West Midlands there are 60 neighbourhoods rated E (the most green-space deprived). The region should aim to eliminate green-space deprivation by ensuring everybody has access to enough good quality green space. In some areas this might mean opening up school grounds outside of school hours or converting some streets or carparks into public green space. It also means increasing tree cover with more street trees and growing more trees and woods on council-owned land. Friends of the Earth has [produced a map](#) identifying where new woodlands could be planted outside urban areas.

The West Midlands region should eliminate sprawl developments onto the Green Belt from the conurbation. These produce car-dependent communities that are unsustainable and incompatible with the climate and nature emergencies. These developments are being supported by local plans in formulation and the mayor should object to such proposals.

8

Becoming a zero-waste city region by 2030 without reliance on landfill or incineration, to reduce pressures on nature from resource extraction and pollution.

Only 31% of household waste in the West Midlands is reused, recycled, or composted. The best local authorities in Wales are achieving more than 70%.

Incineration, or so called energy from waste, is not a sustainable alternative. It's even more carbon polluting than gas-fired power stations and it contributes to local air pollution.

Practical action:

The West Midlands should aim for 70% of household waste to be reused, recycled, or composted by 2025, and to achieve zero waste by 2030.

The mayor should also bring in doorstep food-waste recycling across the region and make it easier for people and businesses to stop sending waste to landfill or incineration.

There are currently 4 municipal waste incinerators within WMCA. These should be rapidly phased out and replaced with closed-loop resource management systems to save resources and to provide cleaner energy from this resource stream, instead of dirty energy from waste incinerators.

9

Calling on the local government pension scheme to divest from fossil fuels, to stop profiting from environmental harm.

Local government pension schemes are contributing to the climate crisis by investing in climate-wrecking gas, oil, and coal companies. This investment is leading to the loss of lives and livelihoods, and the displacement of people from their homes due to extreme weather.

Practical action:

The mayor should make public statements and use their influence in other ways to call on the local government pension scheme to divest from fossil fuels and engage directly with the local authorities that control these funds, encouraging them to make immediate commitments to divest from all fossil fuels.

10 Making the very best of the infrastructure we have, to enact the Climate Emergency declarations, defend nature and introduce more inclusive governance.

Practical action:

The mayor should ensure that the West Midlands is at the heart of the green industrial revolution and is seen to lead it within England. This must include making the best of the region's infrastructure. There are numerous assets, which we're not using to full effect. These include former railway lines, domestic and industrial buildings, as well as social infrastructure. The mayor should be returning trains to our former railway lines, reopening local stations, utilising canals and making the best use of the existing building stock, with comprehensive refurbishment to zero-carbon standards. There should be ambitious targets to reduce car movements, road danger and car dependency, while at the same time massively increasing the number of people taking active travel as well as increasing bus and local train usage. Low traffic and 15-minute neighbourhoods should be the norm, not the exception. The Green Belt and urban nature must be defended, to avoid ever more sprawl and car-dependent development.

The mayor must commit to more inclusive governance, including a climate emergency action forum, and there is a need for a climate scrutiny committee to hold the WMCA accountable. More inclusive governance models should include civil society and work on them should be in progress within the first 100 days of the new mayoralty. An Active Travel Commissioner should be appointed.

Notes and further information

Details of the methodology, data sources and targets used [are available](#).

A summary report on green space deprivation, together with links to a map and full report, [is available](#).

The graph in the transport section is taken from [A radical transport response to the climate emergency](#) by Transport for Quality of Life, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace.

The West Midlands Combined Authority declared a Climate Emergency in June 2019 and has produced its plan [#WM2041](#) – A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery.

The estimate of renewable energy capacity in the area outlined in point 6 excludes offshore wind. It also excludes biomass energy, because some biomass sources can have a large carbon footprint and harm biodiversity. And it excludes incineration, because of its very high carbon emissions.